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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 000334

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/31/2019

TAGS: PGOV KCOR KCRM NI

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: AMNESTY BEGINS FOR NIGER DELTA MILITANTS

REF: A. ABUJA 1407
1B. ABUJA 1226
1C. ABUJA 1173
1D. LAGOS 325
1E. LAGOS 302

Classified By: Consul General Donna Blair, Reasons 1.4 (B,D)

11. (C) Summary: The GON's two-month amnesty offer to Niger Delta militants started August 6 with poor prospects for success. Most in MEND, the loose umbrella militant group, have spurned the offer to date, and the GON's failure to give the program meaningful political context has fueled doubts about its viability. Nevertheless, amnesty is the only offer on the table, and some groups are urging the militants and the GON to take advantage of this small opening to start a serious and sustainable peace process. End Summary.

12. (C) On June 25, President Yar'Adua announced his intention to offer unconditional amnesty to the militants in the Niger Delta starting on August 6. The amnesty is to run for 60 days until October 4 (ref C). On July 15, a spokesmen for elements of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) umbrella militant group, re-iterated its rejection of the amnesty on the grounds that an amnesty applies to only criminals; however, it announced a ceasefire and the intention to negotiate a settlement with the GON. The GON claims that several obscure groups associated with Niger Delta militancy have surrendered their arms, but contacts close to the militants claim that most militants remain skeptical of the GON's intentions and are not ready to surrender their arms.

13. (C) The GON invited USAID and other international donors to seek collaboration on funding and implementation of the GON Amnesty program on July 21 and 24 (ref A). One official requested assistance to establish a large disarmament site in his home state, hundreds of miles outside of the Niger Delta conflict zone. Other officials requested funding for a hodgepodge of social programs such as HIV/AIDS testing and women's empowerment. Donors struggled to find the direct relevancy of these programs to the amnesty process, and declined to support funding for any large-scale program without a corollary comprehensive peace plan in place. On August 4, the donor community was again summoned to the Niger Delta Ministry, this time to receive an appeal for approximately \$139.2 million in assistance. Among the new proposed projects was funding

for Nigeria's Education Trust Fund to send educated ex-militants abroad for training in the US and UK.

¶4. (C) Many regional civil activists are also skeptical. They State that amnesty rewards violence and criminality while failing to address the root causes of the conflict. Multiple studies, commissions and investigations, most recently the Niger Delta Technical Committee Report released in December 2008, conclude that militancy stems from severe underdevelopment, a sense of alienation and disenfranchisement, and environmental degradation . NGOs add that the GON does not appear to have a meaningful plan for re-training or re-integrating former militants, but instead wants to offer a substantial monthly stipend to anyone claiming to have been a militant and accepts amnesty. One source close to Chief Edwin Clark, who is one of the senior leaders in the Ijaw community of the Delta Region, claimed that the militants are being told by political leaders who use them in election campaigns to "turn in one gun, but keep the other."

¶5. (C) Comment: Despite the amnesty program's many strategic and political shortcomings, it is still the only GON initiative on the table claiming to address the Niger Delta crisis. Thus, several groups with a history of seeking peaceful change in the Delta have lobbied militants and the GON to take advantage of this small opening to start a serious and sustainable peace process. At best, the amnesty program offers the start, not the end, of a long and challenging effort to resolve

LAGOS 00000334 002 OF 002

the Niger Delta problem. End Comment.

¶6. This cable was cleared by Embassy Abuja.

BLAIR